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A civic group's efforts to provide opportunities for culturally disadvantaged children are described and the results of the program are evaluated. The poor academic performance of local Negro children in a state-wide testing program stimulated action and resulted in a group composed of professionals and semiprofessionals from local, state, and Federal government agencies; teachers from the local Negro college; public school teachers and principals; ministers; church education committee chairmen; and housewives. The group is sponsored by Negro civic organizations and a Negro newspaper.

The program is varied and the work is carried on by volunteers. Committees sponsor such various activities as remedial and enrichment clinics, summer schools, individual tutoring, recognition of meritorious school achievement, research, evaluation, adult education, encouragement of aesthetic activity, and aid to gifted children.

Favorable changes have been wrought. One of the most visible successes is the degree of understanding of cultural disadvantagement which has come to the general populace and to public school teachers. Public schools, through teacher and parent enlightenment, are improving programs; better achievement scores have resulted. Teacher growth in self-knowledge, in competence, and in self-training is gratifying. The Tutoring and Home Study Committee is helping students to transfer to integrated schools. The committee often takes a program to the homes of needy people who do not enter the provided programs. A preschool program prepares youngsters for the first grade. Though the program was designed for Negro children, many white children join. Long-range projects by the city are resulting from the programs of the civic group.

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CIVIC GROUP EXPERIMENTS IN COMPENSATORY DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

by

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One of the more heartwarming developments in American Education has been the rise in the number of efforts to offer what Dean John Fischer of Teachers College has aptly termed compensatory educational opportunity for culturally disadvantaged children. Generally, such programs of instruction have attempted to scotch the age-grade decrements in intelligence and achievement which plague culturally disadvantaged school populations, reduce school drop-outs, refine aesthetic sensory thresholds, broaden vocational horizons and lift career aspirations.

The broader and more successful programs have been sponsored, directed and evaluated by school systems. Higher Horizons of New York and the Banneker Schools program of St. Louis are two outstanding examples of such efforts. In addition to these, however; and having at least as much potential value, if properly developed, are efforts of community groups to work with these children and their parents on an out-of-school basis. Civic groups have carried forward programs of this nature in San Marcos, Texas, Montgomery County, Maryland and on a less organized basis in New York City. The Urban Service Corps of Washington, D. C. had a fine program last summer and the Ford Foundation underwrites similar school directed programs in our ten largest cities.

This paper describes the efforts of a civic group of Norfolk, Virginia and makes an attempt to evaluate the results of their program. It also attempts to assess the impact of such programs if organized on a broad scale in areas of great cultural impoverishment.

The name of this group is the Norfolk Council for the Improvement of Education and the dynamics of its formation are perhaps important to those who would

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encourage the formation of such groups. The group is concerned with the development of Negro children and is made up, primarily, of Negro middle-class activists and white middle-class liberals. Its origins can be traced to a concern over a published report of the 1960 performance of Negro and white children in a newly initiated state-wide testing program. It is important to note that while most educators expected the low performance of the Negro children, it came as a shocking surprise to a large majority of the citizenry and this group was galvanized into action.

The council is jointly sponsored by five Negro civic organizations and a Negro newspaper. It has as its purposes the motivation and assistance of Negro youth toward a fuller utilization of academic learning and the enlightenment and motivation of the Negro community as to the ways and means it can aid and abet this process.

The membership of the group is comprised of persons with a wide variety of opinions about how youth should be educated. There are professionals and semi-professionals from the local, state and federal government agencies, teachers from the local Negro college, public school teachers and principals, ministers and their education committee chairmen and housewives. The group is led by a very energetic Negro wife of a realtor who is the leading civic leader of the town.

The program of the Council is varied and is designed to reach into almost every nook and cranny of Negro life and culture. Its work is carried on by volunteer work on a number of committees. There is a committee for tutoring and home study which sponsors remedial and enrichment clinics and summer schools and offers short term individual tutoring. The committee for the recognition of meritorious school achievement sponsors a city-wide honors and awards day and passes out certificates to duly certified achievers, the committee for research, evaluation and clinics is composed of public school and college teachers and attempts to

study and evaluate the many projects and programs, carry forward a program of research on culturally disadvantaged children and most importantly, perhaps, offer clinics for parents and citizens on child and adolescent development. The committee for the encouragement of aesthetic activity promotes such for children in schools, churches, and civic groups and the committee for aid to gifted children seeks out those with talent and those who will aid them in a quest for higher education and attempts to bring the two into some form of communion.

Results of the efforts of "improvement groups" are infinitely difficult to measure. It is granted, however, even by its critics, that this group is on the right track and has wrought some favorable changes.

Among the more visible successes are the degree of understanding of the dynamics of culturally disadvantagement which has come to the general populace and to a large extent to public school teachers. One of the clinic series was devoted to this end and an impressive array of consultants and lecturers on the subject was brought to the city over a period of a year. Surveys of parent groups have revealed a greater understanding and concern for the development of children's intellects than was previously the case plus a greater concern that their children study more, read more, broaden their backgrounds of aesthetic experiences and aspire for a higher occupational goal.

Public schools have been affected to a degree also. The school board has been moved to apply for the Ford Foundations Great Cities Program which underwrites school and community work with culturally disadvantaged children. The city P.T.A. council has intensified its efforts for the elimination of school shifts, for a more stringent selection of personnel and for adequacy in facilities and materials for instruction. The most heartening work in this respect has been in the schools themselves where, in many instances, innovation and experimentation designed to compensate for cultural disadvantagement has begun. One junior high school faculty, for an instance attempted to replicate certain aspects of the

sending representatives to visit and observe the program in action. The efforts of this faculty (David Jacox Junior High School) met with singular success. Most of the Higher Horizons Program was replicated, with a negligible increase in budget, using an entering seventh grade class (301 students) as a pilot group. This class had suffered the usual excessive decrements in age-grade placement on achievement and intelligence tests. They performed at the fifth grade level in mathematics and language arts and had a mean I.Q. of 92.0. At the year end testing the group had overgained nearly a year in both subject areas. I.Q. is also expected to be raised. The faculty estimates that by the mid-point of the ninth grade term, this class and others receiving similar experiences can be pulled abreast of national norms in intelligence and achievement. As important as test scores in this project has been the changes of ways of thinking which have come to the community and the faculty. The P.T.A. of the school rallied mightily behind the project and the project, in turn, produced an up-turn in a somewhat flagging interest in the P.T.A. The growth in-service of the faculty resulting from reading and thinking and planning for the project was gratifying to all concerned. The Negro teacher in the South might well harbor a large reservoir of the aggregate will, bent and skill in human relationships which are so important in the development of the culturally disadvantaged child. Reissman has stated a similar postulate in his Culturally Deprived Child. The key for the release of this force is, perhaps, this type of growth in competence in the understanding of cultural disadvantagement and the subsequent defeat of self hate and rejection of heritage which so often plagues the Negro teacher and hampers her performance.

The most fascinating techniques of all used by the committees of the council have undoubtedly been those used by the Tutoring and Home Study Committee. This group has worked to a large extent with Negro students who had recently entered integrated schools, and prospective candidates for prestige institutions outside the south. The work takes the form of summer schools held in churches

tutoring sessions in homes and directed reading for individuals. Much of it is of a supportive nature for students who are venturing into the strange and sometimes hostile world of open-competition. It has served as a rewarding outlet for the social energies of persons with excellent preparatory school and college backgrounds.

After much study of the dynamics of age-grade decrements, social caste and class; sub-cultures, their effects on personality structures together with the development of intellect, the Tutoring and Home Study Committee came to the conclusion that if the Negro were ever to stand alone without the excessive remediation which characterizes present efforts to aid him, some rather drastic changes in child rearing practices would have to take place in Negro culture. The group concluded, further, that practices in the pre-school years needed changing most and further, that the parents and future parents who needed change most (the laboring class and the desperately poor) did not turn out in large numbers to the clinics and programs, read avidly the newspaper hortations for change and were otherwise reached by the efforts of the Council. They decided that if these people would not or could not come to the program, then the program must be taken to them and that it must be taken in terms that could be understood and appreciated.

The group decided to experiment with the Demonstration-Experiment methods of the U. S. Agricultural Extension Service. For two summers now pre-school tots, ages 3-5, have been attending an enrichment and readiness school held in a Unitarian Center located in a transitional neighborhood (from white to mixed) across from a recently integrated high school. Their mothers have been meeting periodically in block sessions on child development and have been coming to the center for programs by their children and informative chats by the staff. This project is underwritten by grants from the Norfolk Foundation and its staff is drawn from the public schools along with a large corps of volunteer workers. A typical week will include work with readiness books, games, vocabulary drills, lunches, practice for the ever present program, sustained conversations with adults, a nature Study

session at the local library branch, a trip to the park, zoo, museum or to one of the arts festivals which are prominent in summer in the Tidewater area (Norfolk, Ocean View, Virginia Beach). One complete day a week is given over to music, art and drama and members of the local arts colony work avidly with the children at this time.

The five and six year old children score at the national norm on readiness tests (Metropolitan Battery) after a six weeks session in this program. As important, they and their parents seem to value cleanliness, order, beauty and knowledge more than previously was the case. And most importantly, their verbal skills have increased, their personalities are less reticent, adults and adult learning is not considered hostile and white adults are not considered orges. All of these things deal heavy blows to Negro children from poor families in the formative years. The cost for six weeks of such a program is approximately $30.00 per child. It seems to constitute a fine opportunity for churches and clubs to be of service.

Some interesting and positive correlatives to the program have been noted. While the program was designed for Negro children, many white children from the neighborhood joined the activities beginning with a "sit-in" at the lunch tables. Many of the white and Negro teachers placed their own children in the activities to teach the object lesson of equalitarianism which is the strength of the lower class and the weakness of the middle. This was deemed especially valuable for white teachers and workers whose children were learning biases in their schools and communities.

As a result of the summer enrichment programs, the Health-Welfare-Recreation Planning Council and the Norfolk Foundation were moved to set up a long range community project which encompasses recreation, community enrichment, community improvements and other facets of the life of the community, drawing heavily on all city agencies and services to demonstrate what can be done in a disadvantaged community.

What of the prospects for widespread civic efforts at compensatory opportunities for disadvantaged children? Although it is almost impossible to predict the dynamics of social change of this sort, one must surely hope that this approach to the salvaging of human resources might be tried elsewhere. The Negro communities of the South with their newly won sense of dignity and purpose whould seem to constitute fertile ground for such innovation. The program might have difficulty winning school board approval in some areas because of overtones of school integration. One factor that warrants attention and which has been observed closely in the Norfolk program concerns the flagging of interest of the activists themselves. This is almost an axiom where reform groups are concerned. The original carriers of the new salvation soon tire and their bursts of efforts are best directed, it seems, toward helping a community to help itself; hence the great value of the demonstration center of the project described here. There is also the great potential value of affecting public policy favorably as witnessed in the present project.

In the final analysis, it would seem that civic efforts of this sort have valuable potentials for effecting cultural change. They offer a medium through which large amounts of social energies can be directed against the ignorance and poverty of our time and they offer, too, a way and a mean by which the poor and down-trodden people are helped to help themselves and to help their children to win a better life. It offers for the more fortunate who work toward these ends the sense of purpose of a high calling--a calling which can perhaps be unparalled anywhere.